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PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS: SCIENCE AND ENVIRONMENT

Written statement*/ submitted by the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[16 March 2001]

*/ This written statement is issued, unedited, as received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Protection of the Human Rights of the Chernobyl Victims
Promotion of the International Support and Compensation

15 years after the Chernobyl Accident: Global radioactive contamination, continuing irradiation and radiation injury extending to the next generation

The Chernobyl accident released huge amount of radioactive materials. The amount of Cesium 137 is estimated about 600 times as much as that of the Atomic-bombing in Hiroshima. According to the report from the UN, at least 9 million people have been affected in the three suffering republics of Belarus, Ukraine and Russia. Almost 400,000 people have been forced to leave their homes. The contaminated areas extend to 5,200,000 km2 including such areas contaminated (more than 0.1 Ci/km2 of Cesium 137 contamination) beyond the effect of the past nuclear testing in the atmosphere. Even more than 10 years have passed, 145,000 km2 of contaminated areas are remaining in the three suffering countries. This area is about 3.5 times as large as that of Switzerland. Even in countries as Japan carrying out pro-nuclear policy, areas of contamination of above 1 Ci/km2 (Cesium 137) are stipulated as "Radiation Control Area" and people cannot enter without permission. However more than 6,500,000 people are still living in such level of contamination areas in the three suffering countries. People have been irradiated internally and externally there. For the economical difficulties the three suffering countries cannot have prospect to make money for the farther evacuation. According to the result of the research of Belarussian scientists, radiation exposure level of children in the contaminated areas (15-20 Ci/km2) was biologically estimated as 200 – 500 mSv already at the time after few months from the accident. (The radiation exposure level of 500 mSv is roughly equal to that of Atomic-bomb victims in Hiroshima bombed at 1.5 km from the hypocenter without any cover. However the level in Hiroshima is estimated as external exposure in a moment.)

The health condition of the Chernobyl victims are getting worse and worse. The thyroid glands of the people were exposed to radioactive iodine released by the accident. (The amount of radioactive iodine is estimated about 40 times as much as that of Atomic-bombing of Hiroshima.) As the result of the radiation exposure of thyroid gland, thyroid cancer is increasing not only among children but also among adult people. Especially childhood thyroid cancer is increasing rapidly. The WHO also reported that the incidence of childhood cancer in Gomel, the most contaminated state in Belarus, become 100 times as higher than that before the accident. In Belarus not only thyroid cancer but also other kinds of cancer such as lung cancer, breast cancer and renal cancer are increasing after the accident. According to the National Report of Belarus, the incidence of these cancers has the trend to increase according to the level of contamination. Many kinds of diseases other than cancer, such as blood and bone marrow, endocrine, gastrointestinal, immune and respiratory diseases are increasing and the rate of healthy people is decreasing every year. Many children and liquidators (the people who engaged in any kinds of job related to the accident in highly contaminated areas) complain many symptoms such as fatigue declined power of concentration, headache and frequent nasal bleeding. These symptoms are in a whole very similar to those of Atomic-bomb victims. ("Genbaku-Bura-Bura Disease") The radiation injury extends now to the next generation. According to the National Report of Belarus, the incidence of the congenital diseases in contaminated areas is increasing, and the increasing rate is higher in the most contaminated areas than less contaminated areas. Moreover economical crisis in the three suffering countries have been making people's life difficult. People have contaminated food more often than before to survive in such economical situation. As the result of this, the amount of radioactive materials in the bodies of people in the contaminated areas is even increasing every year.

While the health condition of people is getting worse, they are always in short of essential medicine and medical equipment in the hospitals. Without the continuous help of the NGOs from abroad, the medical activities and rehabilitation for the victims would be more difficult.

The violation of the fundamental human rights of the Chernobyl victims

In the UN, it has been declaring that the three Fundamental Human Rights; "the right to live" "the right to health and medical care" "the right to environment", should be protected.

"The International Bill of Human Rights" (General Assembly resolution, 1948), proclaimed that "everyone has the right to live, liberty and security of person" (Article 1) and also "has the right to a standard of living adequate for health and well-being ----including medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of ----sickness (and) disability." (Article 25)

"The Declaration of the Human Environment" (the UN Conference on the Human Environment, Stockholm, 1972), proclaimed in the beginning that "both aspects of man's environment, the natural and man-made, are essential to his well-being and to the enjoyment to basic human rights - even the right to life itself" and "man has the fundamental right to freedom, equality and adequate condition of life, in an environment of a quality that permits a life of dignity and well-being, and he bears a solemn responsibility to protect and improve the environment for present and future generations."

The Chernobyl victims have been suffering for these 15 years, with continuous threat to health and life by radiation, but without any neither adequate relief nor compensation. They have been forced to live, even now, in the environment of continuous contamination by radioactive materials. Such situation of the Chernobyl victims is clearly a violation of the Fundamental Human Rights.

In the "Convention on the Rights of the Child" (General Assembly resolution, 1989), it was agreed that "States Parties recognize the right of the child to enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and facilities for treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health." (Article 24) The radiation from Chernobyl has been affecting especially children including future generations. We can never leave unattended the health injuries of the Chernobyl children including rapid increase of thyroid cancer nor inadequate situation of medical and health care to them.

From the viewpoint of "Human right and scientific and technological development" the human rights of the Chernobyl victims and other radiation victims should be assessed

The UN has been working for issues of "Scientific Progress and Human Rights." Also from this point of view, the UN should make it clear that human rights of many people in the world, including Chernobyl victims, have been violated by the use of nuclear under the name of "scientific progress." It should make effort to promote support and compensation to the radiation victims. The International Court of Justice already expressed the advisory opinion that nuclear weapons are illegal according to the international lows of human rights. It pointed out the necessity to consider the special effect of nuclear weapons, especially its destructive power, the power giving inexpressible pain to people and also the power injuring the future generations. Because of the special effect of nuclear, also the "peaceful use of nuclear" as nuclear power plants makes injury similar to that caused by the military use of nuclear. The severe accident of a nuclear power plant is also destructive to environment and people's life and health. It gives inexpressible pain to people and injures the future generations. It is "nuclear genocide" lasting for years. The radiation injury by Chernobyl accident is an actual proof of it. The injury was not caused by the economical and social specificity of the suffering countries. It was caused by the specificity of nuclear. Even if a severe nuclear accident does not happen, nuclear fuel cycle, in its every process, daily brings radiation exposure to workers and radioactive contamination around facilities. Moreover it has been creating and accumulating "the negative legacy" of nuclear waste that cannot be disposed safely with present scientific technology. Some of the materials will remain radioactive semi-permanently.

We conduct the campaign to demand the international support, compensation and protection of human rights of Chernobyl victims also in solidarity with other radiation victims.

The underestimation of the radiation injury of Chernobyl ignores the human rights of the victims and delays relief and compensation for the victims

At the International Conference on "ONE DECADE AFTER CHERNOBYL: Summing up the Consequences of the Accident," held in April of 1996, sponsored by the IAEA and some other international organizations, it was stated, "A highly significant increase in the incidence of thyroid cancer among those persons in the affected areas who were children in 1986 is the only clear evidence to date of a public health impact of radiation exposure as a result of the Chernobyl accident." However, they never conceded any other health disorders of Chernobyl victims as the result of radiation exposure. They also stated, "Increase in the frequency of a number of non-specific detrimental health effects other than cancer among exposed population ----- if real, might also reflect effects of stress and anxiety." They stated this as if such health disorders had no relation to radiation and were caused purely by psychological stress. Scientists from the three suffering republics also attended the conference and many scientific reports were presented there. However, most of the reports about the serious radiation effects from the scientists from these three republics were ignored and not adopted in the final results of the conference. However, many scientists from the world have been strongly protesting against the IAEA's report.

The UNSCEAR reported to the UN general assembly the increase of thyroid cancer of children. However, they denied the increase of leukemia even among the recovery operation workers. The scientists of the Ukraine have been protesting to the UNSCEAR report showing their own data.

Propaganda of the underestimation of the radiation injuries of the Chernobyl disaster has been concealing and falsifying the fact. It infringes upon the human rights of Chernobyl victims actually suffering from serious radiation injuries.

Make the plight of the Chernobyl victims known worldwide
Promote the international support and compensation for the Chernobyl victims

The three suffering countries having economical difficulties without international help can never solve such global contamination and serious radiation disaster. We must make the plight of the Chernobyl victims known worldwide, protect their human rights and promote the international support and compensation for them. The UN and other international organizations should be more active for this purpose. The WHO, OCHA and other UN organization have already making effort for the Chernobyl projects. Their activities should be based on the fact, never on the underestimation.

On the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the Chernobyl accident, we request the UN Human Right Committee to play active role to promote the following agenda.

1) to make the plight of the victims and the violation of their human rights known worldwide. The appeals for medical, economic and social assistance for the affected countries and individuals should be assessed and reported by independent medical personnel. The technical staff of the IAEA, which is mandated with the promotion of nuclear energy, cannot be considered competent for this purpose.

2) to recommend an immediate stop to current proposals to relax radiation protection standards for contaminated land and food, to relocate people on contaminated land and to return contaminated soils to agricultural uses.

3) to recommend an immediate reduction to "permissive radiation levels" for both workers and the general public. It is important to avoid to make any more nuclear victims. The current proposal from the ICRP ('Control' and 'ALARP') is not acceptable because it deeply violates the human rights of the nuclear victims.

4) to promote the establishment of a concrete system of international support and compensation for the Chernobyl victims.